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C O N F I D E N T I A L LILONGWE 000773

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/S
STATE FOR INR/AA

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [TBIO](#) [MI](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT FIRES SENIOR MINISTER, WEAKENS
GOVERNMENT COALITION

REF: LILONGWE 649

Classified By: Ambassador Alan Eastham for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (SBU) Summary: Irrigation and Water Development Minister Gwanda Chakuamba, one of the most powerful politicians in Malawi, has left the government. As a head of a governing coalition partner, he could take some of the 15 MPs from his Republican Party (RP) out of government with him, further weakening an already shaky coalition. Chakuamba, who has been at the center of a number of corruption accusations, had already decided to resign when the President preemptively fired him September 7th. End Summary.

CHAKUAMBA AND MUTHARIKA

¶12. (C) Chakuamba, who has also been serving as the Vice-President of President Mutharika's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), had come in third in 2004's Presidential election. He then joined a government coalition with the understanding that RP members would receive a set number of Ministerial positions, Ambassadorial posts, and parastatal board slots. Mutharika has continually failed to meet the terms outlined in that and other agreements with Chakuamba over decision making in government and the DPP.

¶13. (C) In August 2004 Chakuamba was demoted from Minister of Agriculture (Reftel) to Minister of Irrigation and Water. This dropped him from the number three position to number five in Cabinet. Chakuamba has not been happy about the demotion, and on Monday September 5 told the Minister of Finance that he was planning to quit. (Note: Though demoted, Chakuamba was able to keep the \$150,000 car he bought for himself as agriculture minister. The press has reported that the change of license plate number from MG 3 to MG 5 was another irritant to Chakuamba. End note.)

CHAKUAMBA AND CORRUPTION

¶14. (C) Shortly after his appointment as Agriculture Minister in mid-2005, Chakuamba went to South Africa to investigate the possibility of a GOM purchase of maize for the anticipated hunger crisis. He was abruptly called back from this mission, amid allegations that he had been negotiating a deal for his personal profit. The allegations have not been substantiated, but no grain deal ensued from his trip.

¶15. (SBU) A second story revolves around Chakuamba's alleged purchase of a \$150K BMW with drought-relief money. The Anti-Corruption Bureau is investigating Chakuamba's purchase, while he was Minister of Agriculture, of the BMW for personal use. The Malawian press has made a controversy of the car, pointing out that \$150K would feed thousands of Malawians through this year's food crisis.

POLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS

¶16. (SBU) While he is not an MP, Chakuamba brought the 15 Republican Party MPs into the government coalition last year. However, RP Caucus Chair Aaron Sangala told Embassy officials that the 15 RP MPs are still officially a part of government. He says they will remain so at least until their caucus the week of September 19th, when the party will decide what course to follow.

¶17. (U) Former Deputy Minister for Transport and Public Works Sidik Mia has been appointed the new Minister of Irrigation and Water Development. Mia had previously served as the Deputy Minister. Rashid Gaffar, MP from Blantyre, will replace Mia at the Ministry of Transport.

COMMENT

¶18. (C) While one source says at least 13 of the 15 MPs will resign from government, it remains to be seen how many RP MPs will follow Chakuamba out of government. A number of the MPs are in Deputy Minister or Minister positions, and it is doubtful they would give up the salaries and perquisites of high government office. If a significant number of RP MPs were to leave government, it could cause major headaches for

Mutharika's already small coalition in Parliament.

19. (C) After Chakuamba's decision to quit, Mutharika had little choice but to fire him. However, it seems that with even rudimentary political finesse the entire situation could have been avoided. End Comment.
EASTHAM